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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the benefits of early childhood education (ECE) for children whose proficiency in English is limited. Specifically, the paper (1) defines the basic characteristics of limited English proficient (LEP) children; (2) discusses educational risk factors and preschool enrollments of LEP children; (3) presents the rationale for beginning English language acquisition in early childhood; (4) describes the effectiveness of special language preschool programs; and (5) specifies the components of a quality preschool program for LEP children. The discussion primarily concerns children between the ages of 3 and 5 years and is based on statistical information on demographic characteristics obtained from the following sources: the 1980 U.S. Census; enrollment statistics from the 1984 State Board of Education Bilingual Census; a review of the research on ECE programs providing special language assistance; consultation with nationally known early childhood educators, as well as directors and instructors of school-based programs; and a June, 1985 survey of state and federally funded pre-kindergarten bilingual programs in Illinois public schools. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information on number and ages of children served, program duration, screening and assessment, program goals and instruction, program outcomes and transition, parent involvement, program staff, and support services. The survey questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix A and the three federally funded and seven state-funded pre-kindergarten bilingual programs operating in Illinois are listed in Appendix B. A reference list is also provided. (RH)

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR LIMITED-ENGLISH-PROFICIENT CHILDREN

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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State Superintendent of Education

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FOREWORD

This paper on early childhood education for limited-English-proficient children is one of several background papers written in conjunction with the Early Childhood Education policy study conducted by staff of the State Board of Education. The interpretation and conclusions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the State Board of Education. The paper was prepared by Juergen Hoegl, M.A., M.P.A., Research and Statistics Section, Department of Planning, Research and Evaluation.

Ted Sanders
State Superintendent of Education

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR LIMITED-ENGLISH-PROFICIENT CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

In the last few years, there has been a growing public interest in early childhood education as a means of helping children to become more successful both in the learning environments provided by schools and in the larger social context of their communities. In shaping current public policy, a central question is what characteristics would identify those children who can benefit from early childhood education.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the benefits of early childhood education for children whose proficiency in English is limited. Specifically, the paper will (1) define the basic characteristics of limited-English-proficient children; (2) discuss educational risk factors and preschool enrollments of limited-English-proficient children; (3) present the rationale for beginning English language acquisition in early childhood; (4) describe the effectiveness of special language preschool programs; and (5) specify the components of a quality preschool program for limited-English-proficient children.

Methodology

Scope. This paper is primarily concerned with limited-English-proficient children between the ages of three and five who could benefit from early childhood education due to certain personal, familial, and environmental characteristics. Although the focus is on limited-English-proficient children, there are educational considerations beyond language development that are not necessarily different from those affecting all children. The paper includes such considerations where they are relevant to the discussion of educational needs of limited-English-proficient children.

Information Sources. Statistical information on demographic characteristics of limited-English-proficient children was obtained from cross-tabulations of data from the 1980 U.S. Census, conducted by Community Research Services at Illinois State University. Enrollment statistics came from the 1984 State Board of Education Bilingual Census. Also, a review of the research on early childhood education programs that provide special language assistance to limited-English-proficient children was made in order to assess the effectiveness of such programs.

Staff also consulted with and obtained information from nationally known early childhood educators, as well as from directors and instructors of school-based programs. The nationally known early childhood educators are David Weikart, President of High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Ypsilanti, Michigan, and Rita Weiss, INREAL Project Director, University of Colorado, Boulder.

Another information source for this paper is the data obtained from a survey of state and federally funded pre-kindergarten bilingual programs in Illinois public schools undertaken by staff in June 1985. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information on number and ages of children served, program duration, screening and assessment, program goals and instruction, program outcomes and transition, parent involvement, program staff, and support services. This information was gathered in structured telephone interviews with program directors and instructors. The interview schedule is reproduced in Appendix A. Survey respondents included ten program directors, two instructors, and two program directors who also served as instructors. The three federally funded and seven state-funded pre-kindergarten bilingual programs operating in Illinois are listed in Appendix B. The three federally funded programs in Illinois were identified with assistance from the U.S. Department of Education. The Illinois State Board of Education (1984) Fall Pupil Enrollment for 1983-84 was taken as the basis for identifying school districts in Illinois that had reported enrollment in state-funded bilingual programs of children classified at pre-kindergarten level. There were eleven state-funded programs in 1983-84, but one year later only seven programs continued to operate. One of the remaining seven state-funded pre-kindergarten programs may be discontinued after the 1985-86 school year due to fiscal difficulties in the school district. There has been no formal validation at this time of the information obtained in the survey. However, this information has not been available before and appears to be congruent with other research findings.

Structure. This paper is structured to address issues concerning the early childhood education of limited-English-proficient children in Illinois implicit in the following questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois?

2. How are the educational needs of preschool limited-English-proficient children being served in Illinois? Is present service sufficient?

3. What factors should be considered in determining the at-risk status of limited-English-proficient children?

4. What are the advantages of early English language acquisition for limited-English-proficient children?

5. How does early English language acquisition affect effective content learning?

6. What is the research evidence concerning the effectiveness of early childhood special language programs?

7. What are the characteristics of a quality preschool program for limited-English-proficient children?

THE CHILDREN

Definition of Limited-English-Proficient Children

The term "limited-English-proficient" children generally refers to children who speak a language other than English at home and who either do not speak English at all or not well enough to be able to communicate effectively in an English-speaking social or academic setting. More specifically aimed at academic settings, The School Code of Illinois contains the following definition:

> Children of limited-English-speaking ability means 1) children who were not born in the United States whose native tongue is a language other than English and who are incapable of performing ordinary classwork in English; and 2) children who were born in the United States of parents possessing no or limited-English-speaking ability and who are incapable of performing ordinary classwork in English (Ill. Rev. Stat. 1985, ch. 122, par. 14C-2).

Other terms commonly used are language minority children and bilingual children (California State Department of Education, 1983). Language minority children are children who speak a language other than English, but the term gives no indication of the child's level of English proficiency. Bilingual children are defined as having an adequate level of proficiency in two languages and hence as not having communication difficulties in either of the two languages. Children in transitional bilingual education programs are not bilingual; rather, they are children who need special assistance in English language development (Nevada State Department of Education, 1977).

Demographic Characteristics

The best estimate of the number of limited-English-proficient children between the ages of three and five in Illinois is about 24,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). These children live in families in which parents have limited proficiency in English. For purposes of this paper, the child's level of English proficiency is assumed to be similar to that of the parents and may represent a range from no English language proficiency to a level approaching that of the English speaking peer group. At one end of the spectrum, parents may be communicating with the child only in the home language; at the other, there may be considerable use of English when the parents' level of English proficiency is increasing and when the child experiences exposure to English from other children or adults. The varied levels of English language skills of these children can be determined more precisely with language assessment instruments adapted for preschool age children, such as the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) already widely used at the elementary school level in Illinois and now adapted for preschool use (Valdes, 1978; Illinois State Board of Education, 1985b).

Limited-English-proficient children are far from being homogeneous either in level of English proficiency or in home language background. The range of diversity in home language background is illustrated by both State Board of Education and Bureau of the Census data. State Board of Education data from the 1984 Bilingual Census show that the ethnic and language diversity of children in Illinois public schools, grades K-12, comprises 117 language classifications, from Afrikaans, Albanian, and Assyrian to Urdu, Vietnamese, and Yoruba. This diversity of language backgrounds is reflected in the enrollment of children in transitional bilingual education programs in Illinois public schools. Large proportions of these children speak Spanish, Lao, Assyrian, Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Cantonese, but there are also speakers of Russian, Japanese, Hindi, and Malay, among others. Data from the Bureau of the Census provide some detailed information about the ethnic and language background of 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois. The majority (77.9%) of these children live in Hispanic families or households in which Spanish is the home language (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). However, Hispanic children do not form a homogeneous group, since the national origin of the parents may be any of the more than 20 countries with differing histories and cultures in which Spanish is spoken. Further, there are dialectal variations in Spanish, such as Argentinian, Cuban and Mexican, which make for considerable linguistic differentiation. The next largest census grouping (7.5%) are children in Asian families or households, in which a variety of languages are spoken. The proportionally most frequent home languages of these children are presented in Table 1. Other home languages of limited-English-proficient children between the ages of three and five individually make up less than 1% of that population, which corresponds to about 240 children or less in each language category.

Table 1: Home Languages of 3-5 Year Old Limited-English-Proficient Children in Illinois

Language	Number of Children	Percent
Spanish	18,620	77.9
Italian	760	3.2
Korean	500	2.1
Arabic	480	2.0
Polish	460	1.9
Chinese	440	1.8
Greek	380	1.6
Japanese	240	1.0
Other Languages	2,120	8.5
Total	24,000	100%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population.

The numbers of 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children, both total and by individual language category, derived from 1980 census data and shown in Table 1, represent conservative estimates. In the five years since the census, immigration patterns and birth rates may have contributed to

variable increases in the individual language categories and to an overall increase in the total Illinois population of 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children. Immigration and birth rates for Hispanics in the United States, for example, are estimated to lead to considerably higher increases than in the general population as a whole (Russell, 1983).

The diversity in language and ethnic background of these children, as well as the variation in their English language development, must be considered in assessing the varied educational needs of these children. Other characteristics pertain to their socioeconomic background.

Poverty level is defined by the Bureau of the Census relative to an income cutoff that varies by family size, number of children, and age of the family householder. For example, the poverty level for a family of four with two related children under 18 is an income of $7,356 (in 1979 dollars). Poverty levels are updated every year to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). An estimated 27%, or about 6,500 limited-English-proficient children 3-5 years old in Illinois live in families or households with incomes at or below the poverty level (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). If that income at poverty level is doubled, an estimated 59%, or about 14,200 children would be included. When these children live with a single parent, family or household income, as in the general population, is much more likely to be low. An estimated 67% of 3-5 year old children living with a single parent with limited English proficiency find themselves in families or households at or below poverty level.

EDUCATIONAL FACTORS FOR LIMITED-ENGLISH-PROFICIENT CHILDREN

Enrollment Patterns in Special Language Programs

In this section of the paper, enrollments of 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children in state and federally funded preschool transitional bilingual education programs (see Table 2) are discussed.

Table 2: Enrollments in State and Federally Funded Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Transitional Bilingual Programs in Illinois

Program	Age of Children	Total Number of Children	Number of Children Enrolled	Percent
Pre-Kindergarten	3-4	16,500	725	4.4
Kindergarten	5	7,600	3,787	49.8
Total	3-5	24,100*	4,512	18.7

Note: *Figure exceeds 24,000 due to rounding

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population; and Illinois State Board of Education, Fall Pupil Enrollment and Teacher Statistics, Illinois Public Schools, 1983-84.

Of the approximately 16,500 three and four year old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois, only about 505 are currently enrolled in state-funded pre-kindergarten bilingual programs in Illinois public schools. An additional 220 children are served by federally funded pre-kindergarten bilingual programs. It is not known how many limited-English-proficient children in that age group may be enrolled in private pre-kindergarten programs or how many may be receiving special language assistance from other than state or federally funded programs.

But many, if not most, of the 16,500 three and four year old limited-English-proficient children may be entering kindergarten for the first time without any of the preschool experiences that can provide a transition to the new group and formal instructional settings with an academic orientation now common in Illinois kindergartens. In these instructional settings, the curriculum is oriented toward the achievement of specific learning goals, such as reading and mathematics skills. This change characterizes 90% of Illinois public and nonpublic kindergartens, according to a November 1984 State Board of Education survey. Consequently, limited-English-proficient children without preschool experience entering kindergartens in which special language assistance is not available may find themselves facing the linguistic and cognitive demands of, in most instances, an academically-oriented program in an unfamiliar language.

Of the approximately 7,600 five-year-old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois, 3,787 or about 49% are enrolled in state-funded kindergarten transitional bilingual programs. An additional 610 children, who are six years old and older, are classified at kindergarten level by reporting school districts, bringing total reported kindergarten enrollment for state-funded bilingual programs to 4,397 (Illinois State Board of Education, 1984a). Supplementary federally funded services are available in some transitional bilingual kindergarten programs. It is not known how many of the children in this age group may be served by privately funded special language programs and how many may be enrolled in regular public or private kindergarten programs.

According to these enrollment statistics, an estimated 81% of 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois at present are not served by either state or federally funded programs with special language assistance. Since most kindergartens in Illinois have an academic orientation, there are cognitive as well as social and linguistic demands for which limited-English-proficient children may have had little or no preparation.

Educational Risk Factors

Certain personal, familial, and environmental circumstances may combine to place limited-English-proficient children at risk of educational difficulties (Bereiter, 1985). These difficulties may be reflected in relatively low achievement and attainment, remediation, retention, and school leaving. Contributing factors to be considered include predictors of educational difficulties, low-income background, school adjustment, language and culture difference, and delayed content learning.

Predictors of Educational Difficulties. The following circumstances are considered to be predictors of later academic difficulties: low occupational and income status of the parents, low educational attainment of the parents, less opportunity for the child to realize cognitive potential, and relatively low achievement expectations of the parents for the child (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1981). Children from low-income families, including those with limited proficiency in English, have been found to be at risk of special education placement, comparatively less academic achievement and attainment, school leaving, unemployment, welfare, and delinquency. Finding similar consequences for limited-English-proficient children, Hernandez-Chavez (1984) summarized the research evidence of relatively low academic achievement and low rates of post-secondary enrollment as well as high rates of retention, dropout, and placement in special education (Coleman, 1969; Carter, 1970; Carter and Segura, 1979; National Center for Education Statistics, 1980).

Low-Income Background. Children from low-income families may have a limited range of exposure to the world outside their immediate neighborhood and a limited range of adult-child communication (Bereiter, 1985). As a consequence of limited interaction with adults, peers, toys, games, and community resources, these children often lack opportunities to develop the vocabulary, cognitive and social skills basic to their educational readiness for school learning activities. Inadequate medical care and nutrition have an adverse effect not only on the low-income child's physical growth, but also on intellectual and cognitive development (Smilansky, 1979). Parental feelings of resignation and lowered expectations may affect the child's own expectations of educational and social success.

School Adjustment. Children living in low-income families and children who have had no preschool experiences may have very limited opportunities to develop school readiness (Naron, 1981; Farran et al., n.d.). Children without preschool may be experiencing formal group instruction and the presence of a peer group for the first time when entering school. Hence, children with and children without preschool experience may represent two diverse groups, not only in terms of social readiness skills (Naron, 1981), but also in terms of language and cognitive development. These factors would be accentuated for limited-English-proficient children who enter school without the benefit of preschool transitional experiences. When the child enters school, there may be new linguistic and cognitive demands in an unfamiliar language, and there are also social and emotional demands in adjusting to the formal school setting (Thompson, 1975; Hughes et al., 1979). There are personal variables of intelligence, aptitude, attitude, and motivation (Izzo, 1981). Still, limited-English-proficient children who have not had an opportunity to develop their social, physical, and emotional maturity or necessary school readiness skills are not as likely to experience initial school success as their peers who have had the opportunity (Illinois State Board of Education, 1985b). An estimated 19% of 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois are served by state and federally funded preschool programs with special language assistance. In comparison, an estimated 50% of all Illinois children in that age range have had preschool educational experiences - a conservative estimate based on 1980 Census data (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980).

Language and Culture Difference. A language and culture discontinuity between home and school setting may be a fundamental factor for many of these children. The early language experience of these children forms the foundation on which their learning is to be built. These young children are likely to have little exposure to English since their early language experiences in the home environment with parents, relatives, peers, and friends may be predominantly or exclusively in the home language. Illinois demographic and enrollment data indicate that an estimated 81% or about 19,500 limited-English-proficient children between three and five years old may not have access to special assistance in English language development. Thus, their initial English language learning does not begin to take place until kindergarten or first grade. Hence, limited English proficiency may be a fundamental factor for many of these children who need special assistance in language development in order to be able to participate meaningfully and effectively in English language educational environments. However, beyond the language and culture discontinuity between home and school environment experienced by these children, other social and economic factors in the child's familial and environmental background, identified in the preceding discussion, should be considered in assessing the at-risk status of limited-English-proficient preschool children.

Delayed Content Learning. Even those children who are eventually able to enroll in schools where special language assistance is available may be delayed in their educational progress while acquiring the English language skills necessary to sustain meaningful content learning. Enrollment data spanning grades K-8 of the Illinois Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program show that the student population is concentrated most heavily in the primary grades (K-3) and that more than half (55.8%) make the transition to regular English language classrooms by the end of third grade (see Table 3).

Table 3: Grade of Students Transitioned

Grade	Children Enrolled	Children Transitioned	Percent	Cumulative Percent
K	4,397	375	5.6	5.6
1	6,574	704	10.4	16.0
2	5,183	1,511	22.4	38.4
3	3,518	1,175	17.4	55.8
4	2,787	911	13.5	69.3
5	2,289	704	10.4	79.7
6	1,861	447	6.6	86.3
7	1,770	350	5.2	91.5
8	1,639	288	4.3	95.8

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, Summary Report of Annual Student Report, Transitional Bilingual Education Program, School Year 1982/83. December 1984.

However, age and enrollment data also indicate that, for the program as a whole (K-12), 28.7% of the children are one year behind grade level, and another 10.9% are two years behind (Illinois State Board of Education, 1984b). This lag between grade placement and age may reflect placement and remediation delays, which are less likely to occur when children have an opportunity to begin English language acquisition in pre-kindergarten programs rather than in kindergarten or first grade. In those few state-funded (7) and federally funded (3) transitional bilingual education programs in Illinois that have pre-kindergarten components for three- and four-year-old limited-English-proficient children, grade placement and progression are reported to occur at age-appropriate levels (Illinois State Board of Education, 1985b). Participating children are generally able to transition to the regular English language curriculum one grade earlier than children without pre-kindergarten program experiences since their early English language acquisition provides a foundation for content learning.

Illinois Special Language Pre-Kindergarten Programs

In June, 1985, State Board of Education staff undertook a survey of state and federally funded pre-kindergarten bilingual programs in Illinois public schools. The following review of results describes number and age of children, program duration, screening and assessment, program goals and instruction, program outcomes and transition, parent involvement, program staff, and support services. Table 4 gives an overview.

Table 4: Characteristics of Illinois Prekindergarten Transitional Bilingual Programs

	Type of Program	
	State	Federal
Total Number of Programs	7	3
Number of Children Served	505	220
Number of Children on Waiting Lists	Range: 5-40 Total: 110	10-25 40
Professional Staff-Child Ratio	2:15-2:20	2:16-2:20
	Number of Programs	
Age of Children at Entry		
Three Years Old	4	2
Four Years Old	7	3
Staff Credentials		
Certified Bilingual Teachers	7	3
Bilingual Aides	7	3
English Speaking Peers in Classroom	2	3

Table 4 (continued)

Instructional Schedule		
School Year	7	1
School Year and Summer	0	2
Less Than Five Days a Week	0	1
Half-Day	7	3
Support Services		
Health	5	2
Nutrition	4	2
Social Services	6	2
Admission/Placement Criteria		
Limited Proficiency in English	7	3
Results of Screening/Assessment Tests	7	3
Teacher Interview/Contact	6	1
Language Survey	1	1
Exit/Transition Criteria		
Results of Language Assessment Tests	5	3
Tests of Basic Skills	6	2
Teacher Evaluation	7	3
Follow-Up Evaluation		
One Year	2	1
Two Years	3	0
Parent Involvement		
Parent Advisory Committee	7	3
Home Visits	6	2
At-Home Activities	3	3
Parenting Workshops	1	2
Parents in Classroom	1	2
Home-School Liaison	1	1
ESL Classes for Parents	0	1
Newsletter in Home Language/s	4	0

Source: Illinois State Board of Education. Survey of Public Pre-Kindergarten Transitional Bilingual Programs. June 1985.

Number of Children. There are about 725 limited-English-proficient children enrolled currently in state and federally funded pre-kindergarten bilingual programs in Illinois. Waiting lists for these programs have from 5 to 25 children each for Chicago and from 5 to 40 children each for other Illinois programs, for a total of 150 children. There may be many more children than those on current waiting lists who could benefit from pre-kindergarten programs with special language assistance since there are an estimated 16,500 three- and four-year-old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois.

Age of Children. All programs use a downward extension of state age guidelines for admission to kindergarten, in which limited-English-proficient children meet the age criterion for program eligibility if their third or fourth birthday occurs before December 1 of the program year. Three-year-old children admitted under these guidelines receive two years of instruction in the pre-kindergarten programs before proceeding to a bilingual or regular kindergarten. Two of the three federally funded and four of the seven state-funded pre-kindergarten programs report having three as well as four-year-old children in their programs. If there are funding constraints and waiting lists, four-year-old children are served first. Given comparably limited proficiency in English, children who had an opportunity to participate in pre-kindergarten programs beginning at age three, compared to those who entered programs later, benefited more in English language development, social and school readiness skills, and positive attitude and expectations. Younger entrants are consequently able to make the transition earlier to an all-English classroom.

Program Duration. All seven state-funded pre-kindergarten programs in Illinois are one-year programs that operate during the regular school year, five days per week, on a half-day basis. The half-day is defined as 2 1/2 hours. All three federally funded pre-kindergarten bilingual programs follow the same pattern, except that they continue to operate during the summer. Both state and federally funded programs become two-year programs for children who enter at age three.

Screening and Assessment. All programs conduct initial screening and assessment of children in order to ascertain program eligibility and to determine, among other characteristics, the child's level of proficiency in English. The screening and assessment process includes a range of formal and informal means, but results must clearly define the child's level of proficiency in English as limited before children are eligible for the program. That judgment is based on results of language assessment tests and oral interviews by bilingually certified professional staff. All ten programs use language assessment tests that define the child's level of proficiency and instructional needs category. For example, the City of Chicago School District uses a five-point scale to rate oral English proficiency. The rating of the child's level of English and results of various other assessment techniques then serve as basis for placement in an instructional needs category of A, B, or C. If, for example, children understand very little English and produce only isolated words or phrases in English (Level I), they are generally placed in instructional Category A, in which most content instruction is initially in the home language while children are learning English. If children comprehend and communicate fairly well, but not as well as English speaking peers, they may be placed in instructional Category C, in which most of their instruction is in English (Chicago Board of Education, 1982).

Survey respondents emphasized that multiple assessment techniques are used since language assessment tests at the pre-kindergarten level are not precise. For that reason, five of the programs use not only language assessment tests, but also preschool inventories. Language assessment tests in most frequent use include the Language Assessment Scales adapted for pre-kindergarten use (pre-LAS), the Functional Language Survey (FLS), and the Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM). Early school readiness tests include the Cooperative Preschool Inventory, the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts, and the Dallas Preschool Screening Test. Various screening and assessment instruments have been described and evaluated in detail in a report to the Illinois State Board of Education (Valdes, 1978).

Survey respondents also pointed out that classroom instruction is adapted to the child's level of English proficiency as well as other social, emotional, and cognitive characteristics, but that generally the child's level of English proficiency on entering the program is related to the time required for transition to the regular English curriculum. Thus, children with relatively higher English proficiency receive a larger proportion of their pre-kindergarten instruction in English and need less special language assistance for a shorter period of time. For this reason, three program directors report that between 25% and 40% of their pre-kindergarten participants achieve transition to a regular English kindergarten after one program year.

Program Goals and Instruction. Major program goals for all programs include English language, cognitive, and social development, self-esteem and self-confidence, and readiness for school. Achievement of these goals leads to transition to the regular English curriculum for most children before or by grade two. At that point, the child's proficiency in English is expected to be comparable to peers whose first language is English, and the child is expected to be at or near grade-level norms in academic performance.

Four programs formulate goals in English language development concretely by reference to defined levels. Most children are expected to improve their English proficiency by at least one level on a five-level scale like that used in the Bilingual Syntax Measure and the Language Assessment Scales, which also have pre- and post-testing provisions. Efforts are concentrated on increasing receptive and expressive vocabulary and on concept development, both for improved oral English fluency and as a basis for comprehension in reading.

All survey respondents described pre-kindergarten programs to be structured and operated to give maximum assistance to the child in English language, cognitive and social development. As the year passes, instruction becomes progressively more structured, from initially 40% to eventually 70% of the school day. There is simultaneously a progressive increase in the proportional use of English as the language of instruction. English becomes the predominant language of instruction as soon as the child reaches the level requisite to sustain meaningful classroom experiences in the new language. That process is speeded not only by maximum use of English by the classroom teacher and aide, but also by the presence of English speaking peers in the classroom in all three federal and in two of the state programs.

Survey respondents universally expressed the desirability of having English speaking children in the classroom, even though that is not current practice in five state-funded programs. Directors of these programs indicated that, given waiting lists with eligible limited-English-proficient children, available program spaces should go to these rather than to English speaking children, notwithstanding the loss of potential pedagogical benefits. Garton (1984), writing about the relationship between social interaction and cognitive growth, states generally that social interaction benefits the child when a more competent peer provides the appropriate environment for a certain skill. Verbal interchanges between age peers--the limited-English-proficient child and the English speaking model--are simpler than normal adult speech, but since verbal productions of the English speaking peer remain above those of the limited-English-proficient child, these verbal interchanges challenge and stimulate the limited-English-proficient child's learning of the new language (Dale, 1976). English speaking peers, survey respondents observed, function very effectively as English language models at the level of child-child interaction. The dynamics of this interaction included motivation to communicate and to learn by imitation and adaptation. Further, this early interaction in a social and instructional setting served as an effective initiation of limited-English-proficient children's later transition to English language classrooms with English speaking peers.

Program Outcomes and Transition. Positive outcomes of pre-kindergarten programs with special language assistance for limited-English-proficient children, according to survey respondents, include language, cognitive, and social development, increased self-esteem and self-confidence, and school readiness. Limited-English-proficient children who have the opportunity to begin English language learning in a pre-kindergarten program, especially those children who do not speak or understand any English, were reported to achieve noticeably higher levels of English language development earlier in their schooling than peers who begin English language learning in kindergarten or first grade. As a consequence, these children are less likely to be retained in kindergarten and in the primary grades and more likely to perform at grade-level norms, and continue to do so, after their transition to an all-English classroom.

That transition is made by most pre-kindergarten children a year or more ahead of children with comparably limited proficiency who began their schooling in kindergarten. Most pre-kindergarten program participants attain transition by or before the end of grade two, before the increasing cognitive demands of the curriculum from grade three onward exceed the children's level of comprehension in English. Thus, the timely transition at grade two or earlier, made possible by an early start in English language acquisition in pre-kindergarten, may be decisive in the initial and continuing success of these children in meeting the cognitive demands of learning tasks in the English language curriculum.

Three program directors reported transition to occur in a gradually adaptive sequence. For example, in the bilingual cooperative model reported by one program director, limited-English-proficient children are placed in regular classrooms for individual classes as their English proficiency increases. The usual transition sequence is from less to more language-dependent subjects. Thus, children are usually able to participate in regular English language classes first in mathematics, then in science and in language arts, and finally in social studies. In eight of the programs, transition readiness is determined by results of English language tests of concept development and basic skills, which must be at or just below norms for English speaking peers. A comprehensive assessment system, Measure of Essential Communication and Concept Achievement (MECCA), measuring both English language acquisition and concept development to determine transition readiness for limited-English-proficient children is under development in Illinois.

In six of the programs, children are monitored for at least one year after transition to the regular curriculum. Feedback is sought from teachers and from parents, and in one program results from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills are monitored for two years. Only the Chicago School District has conducted a longitudinal study of the educational progress of limited-English-proficient children after transition to English classrooms (Chicago Board of Education, 1982). The report states that these children were progressing at or above the expected rate in reading comprehension and mathematics, as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. After two years, then eight-year-old children had maintained their percentile rank in reading and improved it in mathematics. Both sets of scores exceeded the city-wide average by large margins.

Parent Involvement. As required by the state statute governing state-funded bilingual programs, all districts with transitional bilingual programs have a parent advisory committee. One of the most prominent functions of that committee is the end-of-year review and evaluation of the district's bilingual program, including the kindergarten and pre-kindergarten components. As part of that review, at least one school district conducts a survey of the parents. Since parents are involved in the program review and in other parent-school interactions described below, their program expectations and their perceptions of the development and achievement of their participating children give valuable feedback to district staff operating the program.

According to all survey respondents, parents place great value and clear priority on learning English. They see the opportunity of a preschool beginning in English language acquisition as an important factor in increasing the child's chances of initial success at school entry, which they perceive to be grade one. Parents value highly the child's opportunity for preschool experiences that prepare the child for kindergarten and grade one and that provide a more gradual home-school transition than entry at grade one. Important elements in school readiness and transition contained in the preschool program are English language learning, especially the development of oral fluency and vocabulary for later reading; socialization and the opportunity to interact with English speaking peers before formal schooling begins at grade one; access to learning materials unavailable in the home; and the child's development of self-esteem, self-confidence, and expectation of success in what was initially an unfamiliar and unintelligible environment.

Parents also value the extension of learning opportunities to them by the outreach functions of the program. One district offered parents classes in English as a Second Language. Three programs have workshops and seminars in which parents learn not only about such parenting topics as nutrition and child behavior, but also about how to help their children learn. There are home visits by teachers and other staff in eight programs, and in three programs parents regularly come into the classroom and help the teacher. Six programs have school-directed at-home activities to reinforce school learning. These various parent-school interactions offer parents an opportunity to engage their children in educational activities. This speaks not only to the immediate but also the long-term benefits of the preschool program. For, as researchers have concluded, once parents see themselves as effective facilitators in the early education of their children, they are more inclined to continue in this role (Randel and Elovson, 1978). The supportive effect of values and expectations parents hold for their children's educational achievement and attainment has been cited as contributing prominently to long-lasting positive effects of preschool programs (Lazar, 1981).

Program Staff. All programs reported having a teacher and a teacher aide in each class. Bilingual and elementary-level certification were required for the teacher; an early childhood certificate was encouraged. The aide was expected to be bilingual and to have at least thirty college hours. The professional staff-child ratio for classes ranged from 2:15 to 2:20, with most (6) programs operating at a ratio of 2:20. Research on class size suggests this range to be adequate (Illinois State Board of Education, 1985a). Although optimum class size cannot be identified on the basis of available research, it does indicate that younger children seem to benefit from smaller classes and that smaller classes provide more opportunities for individualized instruction (Educational Research Service, 1978; Cahen and Filby, 1979; Glass, Cahen, Smith and Filby, 1979). Individual preschool special language class needs may be met most effectively by flexible professional staff-child ratios rather than any single number that is unlikely to satisfy all relevant variables related to effectiveness, such as individual characteristics of children and instructional techniques (Hedges and Stock, 1983).

Support Services. Survey respondents reported the provision of support services to program children and their families similar to those available in the regular school program. Health, nutrition, and social services extended directly by the school or in cooperation with community agencies were reported for all but two programs. In addition, one federally funded program provided meals for program children, and a bilingual psychologist and bilingual social workers and home-school liaisons were available, respectively, in three programs.

LANGUAGE AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Early-Language Learning

There is evidence from research as well as from classroom experience that limited English-proficient children who are at risk of later academic difficulties due to language and culture differences between home and school benefit from special assistance in language development in the preschool and early primary years (Weiss, 1981; DeMauro, 1983; Illinois State Board of Education, 1985b). Respondents to the State Board of Education survey of preschool bilingual programs in Illinois (ISBE, 1985b) conveyed a number of pertinent observations based on extensive classroom experience. This information appears to be congruent with other research findings. According to survey respondents, limited-English-proficient children who have the opportunity to begin learning English in a pre-kindergarten program achieve noticeably higher levels of English language development earlier in their schooling than peers who begin English language learning in kindergarten or first grade. This is in addition to other positive outcomes such as increased self-confidence, social, and cognitive development. As a consequence, these children are less likely to be retained in kindergarten and in the primary grades and more likely to perform at grade-level norms, and continue to do so, after their transition to an all-English classroom (Illinois State Board of Education, 1985b).

Evidence that the early years take on singular importance in the child's language development also comes from a variety of disciplines. Taken together, the findings and conclusions from these disciplines emphasize the importance of special assistance in preschool English language development for children whose English language proficiency is limited (Dermy, 1982; Milan, 1983).

From the field of neurolinguistics comes the concept of the brain's greater plasticity during childhood and the consequently greater capacity and ability of the child to acquire language prior to puberty (Penfield and Roberts, 1959; Lenneberg, 1967). Both Penfield and Lenneberg specifically extended their conclusions from first to second language acquisitions (Izzo, 1981). Lenneberg also concluded that "language development correlates better with motor development than it does with chronological age," a point Maria Montessori noted in her writings on "Language in Childhood" half a century earlier. Based on her observations, Montessori concluded that the development of articulate language takes place in the early period before age seven. She believed that only during that age range is it possible to acquire all the characteristic modulations of one or more languages (Montessori, 1977). In an analysis of the language learning function of children's playful manipulation of the elements of language, Schwartz (1981) noted that Piaget (1962) linked this kind of practice play to the sensorimotor period of cognitive development in early childhood.

Linguistics (Chomsky, 1968) and psycholinguistics (McNeill, 1970) hold that children have an innate and acutely sensitive facility for language development during an early period. Research findings from language programs lend support to this hypothesis. Evaluations of special language programs for limited-English-proficient children in New Jersey consistently report that "younger program students make larger improvements relative to grade peers" (DeMauro, 1983). The verbal aspects of second language development, as well as the level of proficiency eventually reached, favor young learners. Various studies of immigrants have consistently found that younger learners acquire better pronunciation (Dunkel and Pillet, 1956, 1957, 1959; Kirch, 1956; Larew, 1961; Olson and Samuels, 1973). Krashen, Long, and Scarcella (1979) concluded from a review of the literature that people who begin second language learning during early childhood reach a higher level of proficiency than those for whom second language learning is delayed.

These findings and conclusions from research and classroom experience consistently favor language learning for children in the early years of their lives. When children have an opportunity to begin English language acquisition in preschool education programs, they gain both immediate benefits in English language acquisition and readiness for kindergarten and longer-term benefits in English language ability and cognitive development.

Language and Cognition

This section of the paper addresses the question of how early English language acquisition affects the timely and effective content learning of limited-English-proficient children. Since most kindergartens in Illinois have an orientation in which the achievement of specific learning goals predominates over a social, play, or experiential orientation based on children's readiness for such experiences, children entering kindergarten today increasingly need the readiness skills being developed in pre-kindergarten programs. As children practice and learn such skills as listening, comprehending, speaking, thinking, and following directions, interactive development of language and cognition is promoted (Ogletree and DeBarros, 1972; Dale, 1976). The social context of language use is experienced and learned in child-child and child-adult interaction. In addition to these important outcomes, the English language acquisition of limited-English-proficient children is accelerated with special language assistance aimed at the acquisition of vocabulary and the development of concepts and of comprehension. These children have an opportunity for English language acquisition simultaneous with its cognitive and academic application. They learn not only the interpersonal communication skills for various social settings but also the cognitive uses of the language system.

In Illinois pre-kindergarten bilingual programs surveyed (Illinois State Board of Education, 1985b), children are taught not only English language and social skills basic to immediate communicative needs and goals, but also the concepts and vocabulary essential to the comprehension of more academically oriented materials. English vocabulary terms are taught most frequently in relation to concrete objects and actions and in relation to concepts previously learned, so that a meaningful context for that vocabulary is established. Children are also taught vocabulary learning strategies, such as word families and the construction of meaning from context--strategies that assist in the rapid acquisition of vocabulary as

well as in comprehension. Further, in teacher-led groups and in interaction with English speaking peers, children learn about language itself in the playful manipulation of language forms, such as the rhyming and alliteration present in songs and poems. Schwartz (1981) presents a knowledgeable discussion of the importance of verbal play in the manipulation of sounds, patterns and meanings to the child's awareness of the communicative potential of language as language and its cognitive uses. Nedler (1975) discusses these and other successful techniques in teaching English to preschool-age limited-English-proficient children. In short, special language pre-kindergarten programs offer an opportunity for the active construction of meaning central to the limited-English-proficient child's understanding of what is learned and applying what is learned in the new language.

According to survey respondents, limited-English-proficient children in all Illinois pre-kindergarten bilingual programs learn language, cognitive, and social skills (Illinois State Board of Education, 1985b). They learn to participate in group activities, follow directions, and accept responsibility. They learn work habits and motor skills for physical development as well as classroom use. They are taught shapes, colors, numbers, body parts. They learn similarities and differences, properties of objects, quantitative and qualitative comparisons, personal awareness, and social roles. They learn to tell a story using pictures as cues, to classify objects by simple categories, to identify opposites, and to discriminate spatial relationships.

The development of these school-related language, cognitive, and social skills prepares the child for kindergarten, where an academic orientation builds these skills still further. Because of the initial English language learning in pre-kindergarten, the limited-English-proficient child has an opportunity in kindergarten and the early primary grades to experience meaningful English language interaction with teachers and English speaking peers in which the learning of new language occurs in a meaningful context and makes use of concepts and language the child already knows or can readily deduce from the context. Eventually, by second grade on the average, the child makes the transition from the home language to English as the language containing sufficient meaning to support concept formation and comprehension of academic learning in the cognitively more demanding elementary grades. Without such a timely transition to the effective use of English for understanding subject-matter information, children may rapidly fall behind in academic achievement as the gap between their level of comprehension in English and the cognitive level of content learning necessary to each grade widens. Language, as Bruner (1964) pointed out, takes on increasing importance as an instrument for cognition in the young child's schooling. He states that, "in children between 4 and 12, language comes to play an increasingly powerful role as an implement of knowing."

Illinois State Board of Education (1985b) survey respondents observed that limited-English-proficient children who have had the opportunity to participate in a pre-kindergarten program are generally ready for transition to the regular English language curriculum at grade two, while children of comparatively limited English proficiency who began their schooling in kindergarten transition much later, generally not until grade three. Third grade curricula, especially in reading, require much more comprehension. If these cognitive demands exceed the child's level of comprehension in

English, the child begins to fall behind in content learning while still working on English language acquisition. Thus, the limited-English-proficient child's timely transition at grade two or earlier, made possible by an early start in a pre-kindergarten program with special assistance in English language development, may be crucial to the initial and continuing success of that child in meeting the cognitive demands of the learning tasks of the English language curriculum at that grade level. Cummins (1982) points out the difference between the level of language proficiency involved in contextual, face-to-face social communication and the context-reduced, cognitively demanding communication of classroom tasks. For example, reading a text requires active cognitive involvement as a large amount of information is processed simultaneously. In short, "acquisition of meaning in context-reduced classroom situations requires more knowledge of the language itself than is typically required in context-embedded face-to-face situations" (Cummins, 1982).

Children whose first experience in learning English begins in kindergarten or first grade may acquire basic interpersonal communicative skills quickly, but this ability to meet social needs is different from and insufficient for academic needs. Based on the difference of context-aided comprehension in social settings and of cognitive comprehension in academic settings delineated by Cummins (1982), Saville-Troike (1983) states that:

> There is a qualitative difference between the communicative tactics and skills children find effective for meeting their social needs and goals and those that are necessary for successful academic achievement in the classroom.

Pre-kindergarten limited-English-proficient children who have had the opportunity to learn concepts and language simultaneously generally develop a sufficient base of English comprehension to sustain the cognitively demanding tasks of schooling from grade three on. Children with comparably limited proficiency in English who have not had the benefit of preschool English language development are likely to find their learning of concepts and comprehension of subject matter delayed while working on English language acquisition. As a consequence, remediation delays may initiate a lag between grade placement and age of one year or more that is likely to persist during the child's elementary schooling and beyond, as suggested by such a lag found in the Illinois Transitional Bilingual Education program (Illinois State Board of Education, 1984).

EFFECTIVENESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMS: REVIEW OF RESEARCH

Since there have been and continue to be few preschool special language programs, most of the studies of programs that provide language assistance to limited-English-proficient children deal with elementary school populations. For purposes of this paper, the following review of research findings concentrates on studies of programs with a preschool component serving the English language needs of 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children.

A three-year model project for 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children was conducted by staff from the University of Colorado (Weiss, 1981). The program's design was based on the developmental psychology of Piaget and the neurolinguistic belief of Lenneberg of the predisposition of children for language learning. The program design included experimental and control groups, pre- and post-treatment measurements, and a longitudinal follow-up over three years.

The program had both immediate and long-term benefits. Overall preschool and kindergarten data showed significant improvement in the English language development of the children who had participated in the program. Marked gains in English language development were shown by both total test scores and the scores of subtests measuring vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, and active language use. The longitudinal data showed that later language-related learning difficulties of participating children had been reduced notably. As a consequence, the demand for speech-language services and remedial reading services had been reduced measurably, and there were fewer retentions in grade. For example, while 42% of the children in the control group were found to need speech-language services, only 5% of the children who had participated in the program required such services.

Based on the reduction in remedial and other services required for program children, the per pupil cost savings of the program were calculated to be $3,073 (1980 dollars) over the three-year period. In effect, the cost of the program was absorbed by these savings within one year after it ended. Weiss (1981) concluded that these longitudinal and cost findings demonstrated the effectiveness of the program in the prevention of later more costly language-related learning difficulties otherwise experienced by 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children.

This University of Colorado study gives an overview of the beneficial outcomes of preschool experiences for limited-English-proficient children that include special English language assistance. Individual findings of that study were congruent with findings of other studies. Preschool programs for limited-English-proficient children were found to improve their readiness for school (Scruggs, 1977). They were also found to produce significant gains in English language development (Doss and Others, 1979; Austin Independent School District, 1981; Hernandez-Chavez, 1984), especially in vocabulary (Scruggs, 1977). Participating children were found to improve their school performance in grades 1-3 (Scruggs, 1977), specifically their English language skills and mathematics, as measured by achievement tests and grade-level comparisons as late as fourth and sixth grade (Hernandez-Chavez, 1984). An 8-year longitudinal study also found higher academic achievement as well as lower rates of retention and special education for children who had participated in the program (Hartford Public Schools, 1974).

COMPONENTS OF A QUALITY PRESCHOOL PROGRAM FOR LIMITED-ENGLISH-PROFICIENT CHILDREN

In assessing the relative effectiveness of individual characteristics of preschool programs generally, evaluation efforts have been limited because initial program designs did not include the necessary differentiation of variables for a more precise understanding of the specific elements contributing to program effectiveness. Nevertheless, some general conclusions about major components of preschool programs are indicated. The following discussion also presents the basic characteristics of a quality preschool special language program suggested by the research. These characteristics concern the instructional leader, professional staff, peer models, program duration, screening and assessment, curriculum and instruction, program outcomes and transition, parental involvement, and support services.

Some general conclusions about curriculum emphasis and instructional approaches can be formulated from the research. For example, in examining preschool programs with a wide range of characteristics, Chattin-McNichols (1981) concluded that programs emphasizing the development of language and other skills in academic areas produced greater gains on measures of academic achievement and school readiness. Such an emphasis may be in accord with parental expectations of preschool education, as can be concluded from the State Board of Education survey of Illinois pre-kindergarten bilingual programs (ISBE, 1985b). Further, in these programs an emphasis on English language and cognitive development is appropriate to the defined need of improving the limited English proficiency of program participants.

This paper does not address instructional approaches for limited-English-proficient children. Nevertheless, some general considerations are relevant. There is no clear evidence that any single instructional approach is most effective (Illinois State Board of Education, 1982). Further, instructional approaches tend not to be mutually exclusive; rather, in practice there is frequent overlap of elements from several approaches (American Psychological Association, 1982; Illinois State Board of Education, 1985b). Consequently, flexibility in the instructional approach to language assistance that takes into consideration individual learner variables may be most appropriate in improving the English language achievement level of limited-English-proficient children in preschool programs.

Beyond the questions of curriculum emphasis and a flexible pedagogic approach, there are indications from research that help define basic characteristics of a quality preschool program for limited-English-proficient children (Vopava and Royce, 1978; Randel and Elovson, 1978; Lazar, 1981; New York State, 1982; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1978, 1984; Weikart, 1985; Illinois State Board of Education, 1985b). These characteristics include the following:

Instructional Leader. A full-time instructional leader who supervises adherence to curriculum goals, program continuity, and delivery of services to child and family, who conducts regular evaluations and who provides supportive supervision of professional staff.

Professional Staff. Dedicated, mutually supportive professional staff who give individual attention to children. Staff development for the purpose of increasing continuity in curriculum and in children's experiences from preschool through grade three. Each class staffed by a teacher certified in transitional bilingual education and in early childhood education and a bilingual aide. Flexible professional staff-child ratio of about 2:18, adapted to instructional technique and to individual characteristics of children in class.

Peer Models. At least three English speaking peers in each class of the program who function as English language models to the limited-English-proficient children.

Program Duration. A one-year program operating full-time, five days a week, during the regular school year, with at least 2 1/2 hours per day on average dedicated to structured instruction.

Screening and Assessment. Multiple means of screening and assessment that ascertain the child's level of English language development as well as social and cognitive development. Results of assessment used for placement and diagnostic purposes.

Curriculum and Instruction. Cognitively oriented curriculum with an experiential base. Clearly defined curriculum goals that include active learning of language, number concepts, and problem solving. Instruction that is progressively more structured and increases the use of English as language of instruction. Children grouped for English instruction by level of English ability. A high level of adult-child and child-child interaction.

Program Outcomes and Transition. Language, cognitive, and social development, self-esteem and self-confidence, and school readiness as outcomes. English language proficiency comparable to English speaking peers, and academic performance at or near grade level norms at transition. Sequential transition that takes into account relative language dependency of academic subjects. Determination of transition readiness based on an assessment of language proficiency and concept development. Monitoring of student progress for at least two years, using multiple assessment and monitoring techniques.

Parental Involvement. Parent Advisory Committee that participates in program reviews. Various outreach functions that may include parenting seminars and ESL instruction for parents. Activities to promote direct parental involvement in the child's educational progress in school and at home.

Support Services. Nutritional, health care, and social services, whether based in the school or in cooperating community agencies. Home-school liaison.

CONCLUSION

Limited-English-proficient children are likely to be at risk of later academic difficulties. They can benefit from special assistance in English language development in the preschool years, but they are not being served adequately in Illinois. An estimated 81% or about 19,500 limited-English-proficient children 3-5 years old in Illinois are not served at present by either state or federally funded preschool programs with special language assistance. But when these children have an opportunity to begin English language acquisition in pre-kindergarten programs, there are both immediate benefits in English language development and readiness for kindergarten and longer-term benefits in English language comprehension and cognitive development. These children have an opportunity to develop the vocabulary, cognitive and social skills essential to their educational readiness for school learning. A foundation in English vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension and active language use is formed for a timely transition to and meaningful participation in the regular English language curriculum. As a consequence, later language-related learning difficulties are reduced and there are fewer remediation delays and retentions while academic achievement, self-confidence, and social skills are improved.

SUMMARY

This paper has (1) defined the basic characteristics of limited-English-proficient children; (2) discussed educational risk factors and preschool enrollments of limited-English-proficient children; (3) presented the rationale for beginning English language development in early childhood; (4) described the effectiveness of special language preschool programs; and (5) specified the components of a quality preschool program for limited-English-proficient children.

The term "limited-English-proficient" children refers to children who speak a language other than English at home and who either do not speak English at all or not well enough to be able to communicate effectively in an English-speaking social or academic setting. There are an estimated 24,000 limited-English-proficient children aged 3-5 in Illinois, of whom about 6,500 (27%) also live in low-income families or households. Besides this variation in economic status, limited-English-proficient children are not homogeneous either in level of English proficiency or in home language background. Their English language proficiency may range from none to a level approaching that of the English speaking peer group. Their home language background reveals great diversity, which encompasses 117 language classifications for children in Illinois public schools, K-12. Even the proportionally largest group (78%), children living in Hispanic households in which Spanish is the home language, is not homogeneous. The national origin of the parents may be any of the more than 20 countries with differing histories and cultures in which Spanish is spoken, and dialectal variations in Spanish make for considerable linguistic differentiation. Thus, the varied characteristics of limited-English-proficient children aged 3-5 in Illinois include great diversity in language and ethnic background, variation in the level of English language development, and difference in socioeconomic status.

Of the approximately 16,500 three- and four-year-old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois, only about 725 are currently enrolled in state and federally funded pre-kindergarten transitional bilingual programs. Since most kindergartens in Illinois today have an academic orientation, there are cognitive as well as social and linguistic demands for which limited-English-proficient children without pre-kindergarten experiences may have had little or no preparation. Of the approximately 7,600 five-year-old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois, just 3,787 are enrolled in state-funded kindergarten transitional bilingual programs. Thus, an estimated 81% or about 19,500 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois are not served at present by either state or federally funded programs with special language assistance.

Various personal, social and economic circumstances in the limited-English-proficient child's preschool years may contribute to the risk of educational difficulties. A language and culture discontinuity between home and school setting may be a fundamental factor for many of these children who enter school without the benefit of preschool transitional experiences and who must adjust to interaction with English speaking peers. Limited-English-proficient children, especially those from low-income families, may be at risk of low academic achievement and low rates of post-secondary enrollment as well as high rates of retention, dropout, and placement in special education.

Younger children are especially likely to have had little exposure to English since their early language experiences in the home environment with parents, relatives, peers, and friends may be predominantly or exclusively in the home language. These children may be most in need of preschool special assistance in language development in order to be able to participate meaningfully and effectively in English language educational environments. Classroom experiences that are incomprehensible to limited-English-proficient children because of the language difference remain devoid of the meaning on which cognition builds. Also, limited-English-proficient children would not be likely to acquire necessary English language skills by waiting a year to begin school, and any delay of their entry into school would lead to a still greater discrepancy between their experiences and those of more advantaged children.

The majority of limited-English-proficient children in Illinois who have an opportunity to enroll in transitional bilingual education programs, beginning in kindergarten, transition into the regular English curriculum by the end of third grade. In contrast, limited-English-proficient children who have the benefit of a pre-kindergarten program with special language assistance are reported by respondents to a State Board survey to attain transition at least one grade earlier, at or before second grade, before the cognitive demands of the curriculum exceed the English language comprehension abilities of these children.

Limited-English-proficient children who have the opportunity to begin English language learning in a pre-kindergarten program, especially those children who do not speak or understand any English, are also reported to achieve noticeably higher levels of English language development earlier in their schooling than peers who begin English language learning in kindergarten or first grade. This is in addition to other positive outcomes such as increased self-confidence and social and cognitive development. As a

consequence, these children are less likely to be retained in the primary grades, their grade placement and progression occur at age-appropriate levels, and they are more likely to perform at grade level norms, and continue to do so, after their transition to an all-English classroom. Additional evidence that the early years have singular importance in the child's language development comes from a variety of disciplines, which also confirm the importance of the interrelation and simultaneous development of language and cognition.

When children have an opportunity to begin English language acquisition in preschool education programs, there are both immediate benefits in English language acquisition and readiness for kindergarten and longer-term benefits in English language ability and cognitive development. In the Illinois pre-kindergarten bilingual programs surveyed, children are taught not only English language and social skills basic to immediate communicative needs and goals, but also the concepts and vocabulary essential to the comprehension of more academically oriented materials. These children have an opportunity for English language acquisition simultaneous with its cognitive and academic application. In short, special language pre-kindergarten programs offer an opportunity for the active construction of meaning central to the limited-English-proficient child's understanding of what is learned and applying what is learned in the new language.

The development of school-related language, cognitive, and social skills prepares the child for kindergarten, where an academic orientation builds these skills still further. Because of the initial English language learning in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and the early primary grades, the limited-English-proficient child has an opportunity to experience meaningful English language interaction with teachers and English speaking peers in which the learning of new language occurs in a meaningful context and makes use of concepts and language the child already knows or can readily deduce from the context. Eventually, by second grade on the average, the child makes the transition from the home language to English as the language containing sufficient meaning to support concept formation and comprehension of academic learning in the cognitively more demanding elementary grades. Without such a timely transition to the effective use of English for understanding subject-matter information, children may rapidly fall behind as the gap between their level of comprehension in English and the cognitive level of content learning necessary to each grade widens.

There is also research evidence that special language preschool programs can and do improve the language achievement level of limited-English-proficient children. These programs lead to improved readiness for school and gains in language proficiency in the areas of vocabulary, comprehension, pronunciation, and active language use. There were also longer-term gains in reading and mathematics achievement, and longitudinal evaluation showed that later language-related learning difficulties of participating children had been reduced notably. There were lower rates of retention in grade, less demand for remedial language services, and higher academic achievement for program participants. These outcomes translated into substantial per-pupil cost savings. A cost-benefit calculation for one program shows that its total cost for three years was absorbed by these savings within one year after it ended.

However, at present, these preschool program benefits are available to few limited-English-proficient children in Illinois. Enrollment statistics for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten indicate that an estimated 81% or about 19,500 3-5 year old limited-English-proficient children in Illinois are not served by either state or federally funded programs with special language assistance. According to a State Board survey, as of June 1985 there were three federally funded and seven state-funded transitional bilingual pre-kindergarten programs in Illinois serving a total of 725 limited-English-proficient children, and the number of state-funded programs had declined by four in the last year. The survey also produced information on program duration, age and number of children, screening and assessment, program goals and instruction, program outcomes and transition, parent involvement, program staff, and support services.

Based on relevant research findings and survey results, basic characteristics of a quality preschool program for limited-English-proficient children were found to include an instructional leader, a professional staff-child ratio of about 2:18, English speaking peer models, full-time program operation, multiple means of screening and assessment, clearly defined curriculum goals but flexibility in English language instructional approach, sequential transition and follow-up monitoring of children, extensive parental involvement, and basic support services for the child and family.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRESCHOOL BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

1. Is there screening and assessment of children for
   a. program eligibility? (yes/no)
   b. diagnostic and placement purposes? (yes/no)

2. On what basis are children identified for the program or determined to be eligible for the program?

3. Is there a formal assessment of the child's level of English and home language ability? (yes/no)
   a. what instruments are used?

      Language Assessment Scales (LAS)
      Language Dominance Test
      Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-R)
      Primary Acquisition of Language Test (PAL)
      Other _____

   b. by staff/what criteria are used, for what purpose (diagnosis, placement)?

4. What are ages of children (years and months)
   a. when entering program? years _____ months _____
   b. now? years_____ months_____
   c. Is there any delayed entry to the program (reason)?
   d. Is there a waiting list? (yes/no) how many children are on it? _____
   e. how many children repeat the program? _____

5. Is the program
   a. academically oriented: primary emphasis on direct, formal instruction for language and concept development, math skills?
   b. experiential/social/play oriented: primary emphasis on activities and experiences with concrete materials, selected by child and based on child's readiness for such experiences?

6. What are the program objectives?

learning English: vocabulary, syntax, concept formation
math skills: counting, addition, subtraction, quantities, measurements
listening (story reading), following instructions
socialization: child-child, child-adult interaction
emotional/attitudinal development: self-esteem, self-confidence, expectation of success
relative to other program components: parent involvement, support services

7. What part of school day (estimated %) is spent in structured instruction? _____%
How long is the school day? _____ hours

8. What are the major unstructured activities?

eating, rest, bathroom, playground

9. What professional staff qualifications are required?

certification: bilingual; general teaching
Child Development Associate (CDA)
volunteer (none)

10. What is the professional staff-child ratio? _____

11. Child placement and class composition:

a. one-language classification (which) _____
b. several language classifications (which) _____
c. English speaking peers (yes/no); number _____

12. How is the class grouped for instruction?

a. by language ability (yes/no)
b. with English speaking models (yes/no)
c. number of groups in class _____
d. other _____

13. What is the instructional approach?

TBE, ESL, structured immersion, submersion

a. is English the predominant language of instruction?
(yes/no) estimated %? _____%

b. simultaneous content and language instruction in home language?
(yes/no)

c. what is the English language objective?

what is the expected level of English at K?_____
at grade 1? _____

by what grade is proficiency expected to be comparable to peers whose first language is English? grade _____

14. What are program outcomes and how are they measured/assessed?
    a. language development
    b. other learning
    c. parent response/support/perception of the child's development/achievement
    d. at what age and into what grade do most students transition to an all English classroom? age _____ grade _____
    e. what criteria are used to determine readiness to leave the program?
    f. do students who are transitioning generally perform at, above, or below norms for this grade?

15. Is there follow-up evaluation to see how children do after leaving program
    a. in primary grade bilingual program? (yes/no)
    b. after transition to regular curriculum? (yes/no)
    c. other _____

17. What is the extent of parent involvement?

    parenting seminars/workshops/home visits
    at-home activities to reinforce school learning
    parent advisory council
    parent-staff/school interaction

18. What program support services are provided for child/family?

    health, nutrition, social work - by school/in cooperation with other community agencies/organizations (which)?

19. What is program duration?
    one-year ( ), two-year ( )
    school year ( ), summer ( ), other seasonal ( )
    full week ( ), days per week: _____
    full-day ( ), half-day ( )
    other duration _____

20. What is the number of children in your program? _____

21. Other Comments:

APPENDIX B

PRE-KINDERGARTEN TRANSITIONAL BILINGUAL PROGRAMS IN ILLINOIS, 1985

Federally Funded Programs

(1) City of Chicago School District #299
(2) Palatine Community Consolidated District #15
(3) Rockford School District #205

State-Funded Programs

(1) Bensenville School District #2
(2) Blue Island School District #130
(3) City of Chicago School District #299
(4) East Moline School District #37
(5) Elgin Unit School District #46
(6) Moline Unit School District #40
(7) Wheeling Community Consolidated District #21

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